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General Notes.

GEOGRAPHY AND TRAVEL.

A Visit to the Philippine Islands of Masbate and Marinduque.—On the first of May, 1888, after a month's stay in the Eastern Philippines, we sailed from the port of Catbalogan, in the island of Samar, bound for the island of Masbate. Our vessel was a stout little brig called the "Salvamiento," built in the islands, manned by a crew of Indians, and commanded by a Spanish captain. Our cargo was abaca (manila hemp), for the Manila market, and our only fellow-passenger was an old Indian sergeant going up to Manila on furlough. The southeast trades were just beginning to blow, and we set sail at sundown. The month in the eastern islands had been one of the hardest we had passed, with the jealousy of the authorities, poor food, the beginning of the rainy season, and a most difficult and mountainous country to hunt over, and we were pleased enough to be once more turned towards the north and home. The evening was pleasant, and we sat in the moonlight on the deck far into the night listening to the old sergeant's stories, and then turned in to sleep in a shake-down of sails on the cabin floor.

The next morning found us still moving leisurely along under the same gentle breeze, and in the common highway from the Eastern and Central Philippines towards Manila. Islands were in sight on both sides all day, most of them more or less cultivated. In the afternoon we reached the southern point of Masbate, and sailed along the eastern shore. The country looked bare and brown enough. Most of it was campo, a rolling prairie, covered with coarse grass, now parched with drouth, and in many places blackened with fire.

Just at night we turned into the little harbor of Palanoc and dropped anchor, the captain saying that he would wait and put us ashore in the morning, so that we might have time to hunt a house to stop in. He then took me ashore in his boat, and we climbed the steep bank of sixty or eighty feet, up to the little town, and there, guided by the moonlight, along a little crooked street to a low shop kept by a Chinaman, in which were an antiquated billiard table and a bar, and where were assembled the four or five Spaniards who made up the official corps of the island; for Masbate is a province, and Palanoc its capital. The captain introduced me as "Un señor naturalista Americano,"

and an old, grizzled officer in half-military dress began to tell remarkable stories of a young American naturalist whom he knew in the islands many years before. I finally made out to recognize myself in one of these stories, and the old man as an officer whom I had met and stopped with in the island of Basilan in "'74." He was acting governor of Masbate now, and the next morning put the whole establishment at our service. We were too many to accept his hospitality, and he ordered the school-house, which was closed for a vacation, to be put at our disposal. The palm thatch was in bad repair, but we had left the oncoming rainy season behind at our last stopping place, and the tables and benches served us well for our work. Several prisoners in chains were sent to transport our baggage up the steep hill, and we moved in immediately and got over breakfast in our new home while the "Salvamiento" was slowly making her way out of the harbor. The same day several of our party got out to some patches of woods not far away, and found the country so dry that great cracks ran through the soil in every direction. Birds of several kinds, especially parrots and cockatoos, were abundant. All the birds brought in had a familiar look, and the next day the same; and there was now no doubt of it, we had struck another island of the central group, and the birds were identical with those of Panay and Negros. Masbate is distant enough from these to have a fauna of its own, but a study of the sea-bottom will probably show shallows which have not long ago connected it with the other central islands. After we had spent four or five days at Palanoc, and just as we were planning a trip into a wilder and better-timbered part of the island, the steamer "Taal" came into the harbor, and began loading with cattle for Manila. We found she would touch at Marinduque, our next stopping place, on her way, and, after a hurried consultation, concluding we could add but little of value to our collections from Masbate, we packed our goods and got on board the same evening, some of the woodsmen bringing us a few fine tree snails while we were on our way to the steamer. The species of land and tree snails of the Philippines are more restricted in distribution than even the short-winged birds.

The next morning found us well on our way, and passing through a multitude of islands, several of them of considerable size and importance. The southeastern extremity of Luzon was also in sight, and the famous volcano of Albay.

We arrived at the port or roadstead of Boac, in the island of Marinduque, just at night again, and we and our baggage were set ashore just before dark. The town was several miles away, but a few houses,

forming a little fishing village along the road leading up to it, were the sight among cocoa groves. The inhabitants of the place were an inhospitable lot, and, failing to make terms with them, we camped for the night on the beach, among our baggage. The next morning, concluding the port to be better fitted for our purpose than the inland town, we hired a little house just big enough to put a table into and to hang up our hammocks, and moved in, and, hiring an Indian boy as cook, were ready to look about us. The country along the coast was level and sandy, and much of it planted in cocoa groves, the rest showing ditches and banks made for irrigating rice, though the fields were now dry and grown up to grass and weeds, the last year having been too dry to raise rice. Troops of horses were feeding over these plains. Behind this level land the country rose up in low hills, which were rocky and covered with thick bushes. The only virgin forest in sight was several miles away, inland, and on steeper, higher hills.

The birds shot in the cocoa groves about us proved to be distinct, many of them, from any we had as yet procured, though we afterwards found them to be identical with those of the great island of Luzon.

There had been a gradual increase in the number of species of birds found nesting since February, but we now found nearly all species in the full tide of nesting. It seems strange that this should agree so closely with the nesting season in the north temperate regions. Bee-birds, kingfishers, cuckoos, shrikes, fruit-thrushes, orioles, fly-catchers, sun-birds, crows, starlings, pigeons, rails, herons, ducks, parrots, and cockatoos were all nesting. When the natives heard that we had cash to pay for such things, we were fairly besieged with boys and girls and women, with birds' nests and eggs, and land and tree snails. The ladder leading up to our room usually had two or three people upon it, who would hold up their collections whenever any of us came in sight. The native name of the bird was always required, and the nest with the eggs as far as possible. One day an old woman brought a basket with a number of round, white eggs, new to us. She was required to bring the nest to which the eggs belonged before being paid, but said the nest was a "pogo," and was then told to bring along the "pogo." A few days after we found that the eggs were those of the beautiful *Merops bicolor*, the prettiest of the two Philippine bee-eaters, and that they are laid in a hole in the ground, and this was the "pogo" we had demanded of the old woman.

The number of birds building nests in holes here seemed to me to be rather remarkable. Among these were the bee-eaters, kingfishers,

swallows, shrikes, two species of starlings, cockatoos, parrots, owls, woodpeckers, and hornbills. But for the help of the natives our collections would have been poor ; but the island seems over-populated, at least for the methods of cultivation used, and the people were anxious to get our money. Among the animals brought us were two of the curious Philippine rats (*Phloeomys*). They were nearly as large as our common gray rabbit, light-gray in color, with short black tails. They were brought living, tied together to a stick, and had nearly cut each other to pieces before we received them.

A trip down the beach to the south two or three miles brought us to a small creek flowing out of the hills, and following this up we found some woodland in the steep ravines, and many birds, among them two species of beautiful pittas, in abundance, and further above, a few of the great hornbills (*Buceros hydrocorax*), and the curious crested cuckoos (*Dasylophus*), before supposed to be limited to Luzon. At about the same distance to the north there was a tract of lowland, much of it planted in rice, which was now being harvested, and here all kinds of waders were abundant,—rails and gallinules and herons of several species, most of them nesting, and a few Philippine mallards. Along the sea beach were thickets of small timber, and upon these we found one of the prettiest of the Philippine tree snails quite abundant, while the natives brought us from further inland quantities of *Bulimus philippenensis* and *woodianus*, two of the largest and finest species in the islands. The weather, which was dry when we arrived, gradually changed. Rain-clouds gathered over the hill-tops, and before the close of the month we had several heavy showers, and the rainy season had begun, and we prepared to move before it again,—this time to the little-known island of Mindoro, which was in sight across the strait, twelve or fifteen miles away.—J. B. STEERE, *Ann Arbor, Mich.*